

1377
AN
E S S A Y
ON THE
P O P U L A T I O N
OF
I R E L A N D.

By the Reverend J. ^{K.}HOWLETT,
Vicar of GREAT DUNMOW, ESSEX.

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ESSAYS

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POPULATION

OF

IRELAND.

By the Reverend J. HOWLITT,
Vicar of Great Dunmow, Essex.

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ESSAY, &c.

IT is surely a singular circumstance, that Dr. Price, who is so confident that the returns for the *English* Hearth-tax, (though now discontinued about ninety years) when compared with the present returns for the window-tax, though of a kind totally dissimilar, are a satisfactory ground from which to compute the population of England and Wales, should, at the same time, be equally confident, that the returns for the *Irish* Hearth-tax, though continued nearly upon the same footing from the Revolution to the present day, and therefore properly comparable together for different periods within the compass of this interval, do not, however, enable us to

judge either of the progress or actual state of the population of Ireland. This, on the very face of it, appears strangely inconsistent; and, when we come to examine the fact, we find the truth of the case to be just the reverse in both instances. The *English* returns, as far as the Doctor has stated and considered them, scarcely afford any information upon these subjects at all; the *Irish* ones, on the contrary, are as full and compleat to the purpose, as any thing of the kind can well be. The former I have pretty amply discussed in a separate essay; the Doctor's account of the latter is in substance as follows: "The Irish returns to the Hearth-tax
 " afford no documents from which a judgment
 " tolerably correct can be formed of the pro-
 " gress or present state of the population
 " of Ireland. All that is known from them
 " with certainty is the yearly produce of the
 " tax; the average of which being for the last
 " five years to 1781, £.60,648, makes the
 " number of hearths, (at 2s. per hearth), to be
 " 606,480. It is supposed that a house may be
 " allowed for every two hearths, and that one-
 " third of the houses are excused on account
 " of poverty; and on these suppositions the
 " number of houses will exceed 400,000, and
 " con-

“ consequently the inhabitants will be about “ 2,000,000.” Admitting the principal fact here asserted to be true, *that nothing can be known with certainty from these returns but the annual produce of the tax*, the hypothetical reasoning grounded upon it is the most inapplicable that can be conceived. Instead of there being two hearths upon an average to a house, as is here supposed, there are actually very little more than one and three-tenths ; and instead of one-third of the houses being excused upon account of poverty, there is scarcely one in twenty-six *. Were it necessary, both these assertions might easily be proved ; but the leading fact itself being

* In England, half the total number of houses are excused upon account of poverty. This striking difference Mr. Beresford justly imputes to our system of Poor Laws, which has not yet taken place in Ireland ; but the poor continue to be supported by voluntary contributions, which, as far as appears, very well answer the purpose. If so, it is clear, that our legal provisions for their maintenance, which were at first probably dictated by humanity, have brought an annual burden upon the kingdom of at least two millions, besides depriving the revenue of more than £.100,000 a year, without answering any other end than encouraging idleness and insolence. For after all, our voluntary contributions are still, perhaps, nearly as considerable as when they were the only mode of relief.

being false, the hypothesis applied to it is of no consequence. And that the leading fact is false, the following intelligence sent me by the Right Honourable Mr. Beresford, first commissioner of the Irish revenues, sufficiently proves. “ I observe,” says he, “ from your letter, that Dr. Price asserts that nothing is here known with certainty but the produce of the tax. This assertion is certainly ill-grounded; for I take it for granted that a man of Dr. Price’s liberality of sentiment does not mean to quibble by adhering to the literal sense of these words; but must intend to be understood, that in Ireland we have not any return made of houses, but that we compute the number of them from the number of the hearths returned, or from the amount of the tax; but the fact is, that the hearth-money collector is ordered by his instructions to go at a certain time of the year, and make an actual survey of his walk, inserting in a ledger for that purpose the number of houses in each parish, &c. and then, after the walk is thus surveyed, he is to go it over again, and collect the tax; and if in such second round he shall discover any new house, not before discovered, he is to enter it in his ledger.

“ Besides

“ Besides these precautions we have a superior
 “ officer called a supervisor, who has generally
 “ about four collectors under him, except in
 “ cities. It is this officer's duty to survey at
 “ least one walk in a year, and to make a re-
 “ turn of his survey, which is intended as a
 “ check. It is clear then that there is a return
 “ of houses made in each walk, and that each
 “ walk certainly contains as many houses as are
 “ returned; and it is also to be observed, that
 “ all computations made from the number of
 “ the hearths, or the amount of the tax, uncon-
 “ nected with other information, must be ex-
 “ tremely erroneous; because it is by conceal-
 “ ing the former and diminishing the latter that
 “ the hearth-money collector is enabled to com-
 “ mit frauds. He may make a true return of
 “ the number of *houses*, and yet retain a consi-
 “ derable proportion of the *tax* by a false re-
 “ turn of the number of *hearth*s; whereas if he
 “ returned the *true* number of *hearth*s he could
 “ not defraud. He is interested, therefore, in
 “ making a false return of *hearth*s, but has no
 “ motive to make a false return of *houses* *.”

From

* The statutes themselves, indeed, which enacted the Irish
 hearth-tax, seem to require a return of *houses* distinct from the
 return

From this account it is exceedingly clear that there is an actual return of *houses* constantly and regularly made ; and although this return be not perfectly and compleatly correct, yet in all probability, it cannot be greatly deficient. The surveyor, we see, has no inducement to make it so ; and if he did, the supervisor would much more

return of *hearths*. These statutes I have not by me, nor have I ever seen them. But Mr. Beresford favoured me with extracts from the only ones immediately on the subject, That passed in the 14th and 15th Car. II. chap. 17. and That of the 17th and 18th Car. II. chap. 10. The extracts being long, I content myself with these references and with Mr. Beresford's conclusions from them ; which are, " that they clearly prescribe, first a return of every *house* in every parish, and next " a return of every *hearth* in each *house*." On the contrary, I cannot find that the *English* statutes, respecting the hearth-tax, enjoined either any such *distinct* returns, or even any returns of *houses* at all ; but merely the returns of *persons* possessing hearths, stoves, &c. and the number of *hearths*, *stoves*, &c. in their respective possessions. Nor have I been able to discover that any such judicious measures as above described were ever adopted by our hearth-tax commissioners for ascertaining the actual number of houses in England near the time of the Revolution. While, therefore, the *Irish* hearth-tax returns afford satisfactory ground by which to compute the present and past population of *Ireland*, our hearth-tax returns give very precarious assistance for that purpose with regard to *England* and *Wales*.

more easily detect him, than he could in any false return of *hearths*. So that what Dr. Price asserts to be the only *certainty* in the case, *the annual produce of the tax*, turns out to be the greatest *uncertainty* of all *; though even this, by the very judicious methods repeatedly adopted by Mr. Beresford, bids fair for no inconsiderable degree of correctness.

The number of houses returned for the whole kingdom in the year, ending at Lady-day, 1781, were

With one hearth,	-	-	400,783
With from two to five hearths inclusive,			43,980
With more than five,	-	-	15,098
Houses with widows certificates, (<i>i. e.</i>)			
houses excused on account of poverty,			17,741
Total of every denomination,			477,602

These are the number of houses, says Mr. Beresford, returned for the whole kingdom, as extracted from the books of the several hearth-money collectors, according to surveys by them actually made agreeable to the above representations ;

* I mean is the most likely to be deficient of what it ought to be.

tations ; and these houses each of them contain one, two, or more families, nay, in the towns, especially Dublin, and that district of it which is called the Liberties, even four, five, or six.

Mr. Beresford remarks, that the returns of houses in some walks of the kingdom are still, he has reason to believe, nearly one-twentieth deficient, and that besides these, the hospitals, barracks for twelve thousand soldiers, and buildings for the residence of six or seven hundred revenue officers, are likewise intirely unnoticed. Upon the whole, therefore, putting all these circumstances together, the total number of houses in the kingdom cannot be less than five hundred thousand ; and it is equally clear from what is stated above, respecting the contents of each house, and from what Mr. Beresford has elsewhere observed concerning the extreme populousness of their smallest and poorest huts, that the average number of persons to a house cannot be less than five : consequently, the present population of Ireland must amount to at least two millions and a half*.

As

* Dr. Price informs us, P. S. to Rev. Paym^t. page 320, that a survey of Belfast was made in January, 1782, from which

As to the progress it has made in the course of the last hundred years, a pretty satisfactory estimate may be formed from various data. According to an account in the Philosophical Transf. Vol. III. p. 666, and given us likewise by Dr. Price, P. S. Rev. Payms. Vol. II. p. 309. the number of people in Ireland in 1695 did not much exceed a million; they are of course since that time more than doubled. But from the very wording of this account it seems to have been rather a random computation; and, therefore, when considered in itself alone, not to be implicitly relied upon. It is however, in some measure confirmed by the comparative product of the tax near the two periods in question. Mr.

Chalmers,

which it appeared that that town consisted of 2026 houses, containing 13105 inhabitants. This makes nearly $6\frac{1}{2}$ persons to a house. In the town of Manchester, one of the most flourishing we have, there are but about $6\frac{1}{4}$. I have elsewhere proved that the average of persons to a house in England, exclusive of London, is about $5\frac{1}{2}$. From this comparison of the number of persons to a house in Belfast and Manchester, may we not conclude, with some probability at least, that the average of persons to a house in Ireland, including Dublin, cannot be less than $5\frac{1}{2}$. This admitted, the present population of that kingdom cannot be less than two millions and three quarters.

Chalmers, in his excellent estimate, &c. page 193 of the Appendix, from an accurate document (*a*), informs us that upon a medium of five years, ending with 1687,

The annual tax amounted to	-	£.32,416
On a medium of three years, ending with 1732,	-	42,457
On a medium of seven years, ending with 1777,	-	59,868
In the year 1778 it produced	-	61,646
In the year 1779 (<i>b</i>),	-	60,617
On a medium of five years, ending with 1781, as stated above by Dr. Price,	-	60,648
In 1781, as sent me from the hearth-tax office by the first commissioner of the revenues,	-	63,820

From all these accounts, the authenticity of which admits of no doubt, it appears that the produce of the tax, and, with the allowances above suggested, the population of the kingdom, have been constantly increasing during the last hundred

(*a*) Bibl. Harl. Brit. Mu. No. 4.

(*b*) Appendix to Young's Tour.

hundred years, and that they are now each of them nearly double what they were about the time of the Revolution.

But the most full, direct, and satisfactory evidence of the degree of advanced population during the hundred years, ending with 1772, arises from the following statements with which I have been favoured by Mr. Beresford, whose very obliging and liberal communications I can never sufficiently acknowledge.

STATE

STATE of the DWELLINGS in IRELAND in 1772, compared with SIR WILLIAM

PETTY's State of them in 1672.

Houses.	1672.	1772.	Increase.
Under 2 Hearths,	-	375,444	191,444
With 2 & 3 Hearths,	-	31,785	24,985
With 4, 5, & 6 Hearths,	-	13,273	7,673
With 7, 8, & 9 Hearths,	-	6,738	4,238
With 10, 11, & 12 Hearths,	-	1,672	972
With 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, & 20 Hhs.	400	685	285
Above 20 Hearths,	-	162	142
Totals,	200,020	429,759	229,739

[4]

From this Table a variety of important conclusions seem fairly deducible. The houses in 1772, we see, were twice as many as in 1672, and one-fourth over; and, allowing 5 persons to a house, the number of inhabitants in 1672 was about a million, in 1772 more than two millions. The poorer people appear to have been more than doubled; the rank next above them, or that inhabiting houses with two and three hearths, to have been multiplied almost five times; those dwelling in houses from four to six hearths almost tripled, as well as the orders next above them; and the highest rank of all, or that of persons inhabiting houses which contain above twenty hearths, was augmented more than eight times. The total population of the kingdom seems to have been more than doubled in the course of the hundred years, and as the superior kind of houses were increased four, five, six, and even eight times, its wealth and riches in all probability, were five, or six, or even eight times as great in the latter of the two mentioned periods, as in the former.

The above estimates of the present and past population of Ireland, though they pretend not to perfect correctness, are founded, however,
upon

upon such data, that they cannot be very wide of the truth. Had Doctor Price produced as good ones of the number of people in England and Wales, either from the returns of houses at the tax-office, or from any other principles, I should most readily have acquiesced in them as sufficiently accurate. And, I cannot help remarking, by way of general conclusion from the whole, that if the population, the wealth and prosperity of *Ireland* have been so clearly, so certainly and greatly increased, we must violate every rule of analogy to suppose that *England*, which is so closely connected with her, and possessed, perhaps, of still superior advantages, should not also, in every one of these particulars, have made, in some degree, a similar advance.

F I N I S.

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